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Our Northernmost Possessions

BY JESSIE W. RADCLIFFE.

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It was in 1867 that Secretary Seward recommended the purchase of Alaska from Russia. Every sort of absurd name was suggested for it, among others, Seward's Folly. Fortunately, its original native name, Al-ev-ek-sa or Alaska, was retained and its significance. "The Great Land," is but beginning to be appreciated. This great land is as large as all the New England and Middle States, with Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Kentucky and Tennessee combined: as large as all of the United States east of the Mississippi and north of Georgia and the Carolinas, or nearly one-sixth of the entire area of the United States. It will help us to think of this great country in three divisions, like ancient Gaul, southeastern or Sit-kan Alaska, where the greater part of the English speaking natives live, and through whose numerous islands only, does the tourist sail; Western or Aleutian Alaska, which includes the Seal Islands of which we hear so much, and Arctic Alaska.

The coast line, singularly indented, is twice as long as that of our Atlantic and Pacific seaboards combined; nearly equal to the circumference of the earth, while, stretching as it does to the northwest toward Siberia, the most westerly of the Aleutian Islands is as far west of San Francisco as that city is west of Cape Cod.

Its greatest river, the Yukon, is as long as the Amazon; its mountains tower above Pike's Peak, Mt. St. Elias being the highest peak on the continent, and include many active and extinct volcanoes.

Like England, Alaska is rescued from the desolation of the northland by a gulf stream, called the Japan current, which sweeping over from the warm islands of

Asia, blesses the land. The mean annual temperature of Sitka is the same as that of Georgia, while in summer it is the same as that of Detroit.

Arctic Alaska has, of course, intense cold. The staple products of this land are not as was so often said in derision at the time of the purchase, "polar bears and icebergs," but furs, gold, silver, marble, coal, copper, rivers full of salmon, promising a commercial future of magnitude.

It is a singular fact that the Greek Church has left so little impression after one hundred years of supremacy. It is a curious fact too, that in 1793, when Catharine, Empress of Russia, commanded her missionaries to go to Alaska to instruct the natives in religion she also ordered convicts shipped from Siberia to teach them agriculture.

The outrages of these unscrupulous men and the traders who preceded them, are unspeakable. In ten years the number of natives was reduced one-half; their lives were valued no more than those of dogs, and spirit and life were nearly stamped out of the remainder. The Russian proverb that "Heaven is high and the Czar distant," was the encouragment of these horrors.

The Greek priests could not stem the tide—few of them tried. There are some noble exceptions, one, Bishop Veniaminoff, filled with real missionary ferver, did great things for the natives, until, his ability making him conspicuous, he was called back to Russia to be made Metropolitan of Moscow.

The priests multiplied schools, in most of which, however, little but the rites of the Greek church and the Russian language were taught, and in which the white and half-breed children made up the list, the Indian attendance not being encouraged. Fins, Swedes and Germans being largely employed by the fur companies, in 1845 a Lutheran missionary was sent to them by Russia, but he did not teach the natives.

When, in 1867, the flag of Russia was hauled down and the Stars and Stripes floated instead, the Russian schools and churches were for the most part closed, the Russians and other Europeans returned to Europe, leaving a people corrupted and degraded by their influence.

The Lutheran preacher departed with his flock, a few United States soldiers were placed in former Russian

forts, new sets of equally vicious traders began their work, the newspapers exhausted themselves in sarcasm and condemnation of the new territory, the Church of Christ everywhere forgot that Alaska was part of "the whole world" covered by the divine commission, and the Great Land was left in darkness, without law, government, teachers, preachers, schools or charities.

No one thinks to-day of asking if the annexation were a good thing for the United States.

Financially it was a Yankee bargain. The capital invested—$7,200,000—has all been paid back in annual dividends which are increasing every year, and the United States Treasury itself has drawn usurious interest from its investment.

Politically and strategically, its purchase was a stroke of sagacious statesmanship.

Had this not been conceded before, the facts of the Behring Sea controversy, with its Arbitration Committees, composed of some of the best minds of England and America, would prove the importance of that one corner of Alaska in the eyes of governments.

The question from the Christian standpoint is, Has the annexation been a good thing for Alaska? It would seem that a land which became ours by voluntary purchase, brought to the nation a peculiar responsibility; yet the half light of Russian rule was better than the total darkness which followed

For seventeen years Congress neglected to provide any form of civil government, checking all progress and healthy development.

It was the prodigious growth of the Northwest, tales of gold discovery in Alaska, and last but not least, the work of our own noble missionaries, which indicated the wisdom of Seward and eventually shamed the United States into an attempted assumption of its duty.

The present geographical and scientific knowledge of Alaska has been largely gained through the pioneer church, as is so often the case.

Those who know whereof they speak tell us that a revolution in Northern Alaska would be far more justifiable than that of '76, for our wrongs were a trifle compared to theirs. The work of the bloodthirsty Spaniard in Mexico and Peru is being enacted to-day in Alaska by Americans. Were these Eskimos not what they

are, a nation of children, they would have rebelled 'ere this at the rapacity of American commerce, taking everything from them and leaving nothing but what is deplorable.

Is it not a tragic fact that abused and demoralized natives, refuse and spurn the cup of salvation, because it is offered by white hands?

It is only by persistent Christian and educational work, the government and the church working hand in hand, that help may come, and these poor creatures learn that all white men are not bad men.

To-day, although the importation, manufacture and sale of intoxicating liquors is prohibited by government, traders come in schooners fitted out in San Francisco or the Sandwich Islands with cargoes of whiskey labeled "Florida Water," "Bay Rum," "Pain Killer," or "Jamaica Ginger," to sell at exorbitant rates, to the natives, for furs, ivory and whalebone.

On one island, called St. Lawrence, after such a visit a few years ago, the whole summer was spent in idleness and drunkenness, instead of preparation for the winter, with the result that of the population of four hundred, every man, woman and child had frozen or starved to death before the winter was past. And this is but one of dozens of similar authenticated cases. If this seems incredible, I refer to government reports from which I gained the facts.

The first organized Christian work in Alaska was begun by an Alaskan.

Educated and brought to Christ in a Methodist Mission in British America, where he had gone for work, he returned some years later to Fort Wrangel, in Alaska, to cut wood, for, unlike our native Indians, the Alaskan is a willing laborer.

Wrangel, a military trading post, was a centre of immorality and ignorance. With few exceptions the white men were of the lowest type, had brought and taught vice of all kinds, introduced liquor and led the Indians in diabolical orgies and inhumanities.

Philip, for so was the Indian called, an apostle chosen of God to his kindred, turned an old dance-room into a schoolroom and preaching place. We learn how the commandant of the Fort protected him; how the few decent whites, too timid or indifferent to have started

such work themselves, rallied around him, how discouraging for a long time were the fruitless efforts of all, including the Christian wives of some Army officers, to interest, to the the extent of practical aid, the people "down below,"

Inseparable as the name of Carey with India, or Eliot and Brainard with the Indian in the East, is the name of Sheldon Jackson with Alaska. Sent by the church to investigate the needs, and to return before navigation closed, he felt he could not take the hungry souls up there nothing but promises; he must take with him and leave some one ready for instant self-sacrifice.

That one was a woman, Mrs A. R. McFarland, she went on five days' notice, having been trained to conquer emergencies in twenty years' missionary labor, and already consecrated to her work by bereavement and sorrow. She consented cheerfully to remain alone on the Alaskan coast, the one missionary in Alaska, the sole representative of the 30,000,000 Protestants of the United States.

These two arrived at Wrangel in time to take the work from the dying hands of the Indian Philip. Then Dr. Jackson must return, and that brave woman, the only Christian white woman in the country, with an Indian woman as interpreter, with twenty-seven books, no school house, and the probability of a boat from below once a month, began Christ's work in Alaska.

The military force had been withdrawn, so she was left, with a few whites and a thousand Indians, in a place without law or order.

She became nurse, doctor, undertaker, preacher, teacher, practically mayor and administrator generally, for all came to her, and burdened almost beyond endurance she kept writing for help, for a magistrate of some sort, or an ordained minister. Such a thing as a marriage ceremony was unknown, polygamy common, and domestic complications appalling. Tribes around began to hear of her and came for help. One old Indian of a distant tribe came and said: "Me much sick at heart, my people all dark heart, nobody tell them that Jesus died. By and by, my people all die and go down—dark, dark!"

The young girls especially appealed to her care. It is thrilling to read how she fought to save them from

being sold by their parents to white scoundrels; how she rescued two girls from the horrors of the devil dance, how, finding them bound, naked, in the centre of fifty dancing, frantic fiends, who with yells cut them with knives and tore off pieces of their flesh, she rushed into the midst, and after hours of pleadings and threatening with the wrath of the United States, she took off the half-dead girls to her own house, only to have one of them recaptured and killed during the night.

Finally, aid came, through the strenuous effort of Dr. Jackson. The fearful year of lonely work was at an end, though the work was but begun. Mrs. McFarland has since done similar pioneer work further north, where she is still living.

The mission at Sitka was established this same year, and a growing interest and support has followed such heroic beginnings.

In 1885 a small appropriation was made to start a pulic school system for all, without reference to race. This, a comparatively simple matter where railway lines and stage roads lend their aid, was a tremendous undertaking in this large land, with no public conveyance save a monthly steamer in the southeast corner, the only means of transportation being by log or skin canoe, and necessitating tens of thousands of miles of such travel, the future schools to be from one hundred to one thousand miles apart, their teachers to receive mail thrice, twice, or once a year, as the case might be, the school to be English, though those to be taught knew no English (fancy our children taught through the medium of Chinese teachers and books and you have a parallel case). To plan all this required some one with knowledge of the ground and dialects and it was fitting that Dr. Sheldon Jackson should be made General Agent of Education in Alaska, and it is seen at once that few teachers, unless inspired with some motive higher than salary, would give themselves to such work.

Dr. Jackson's crowning work has been the establishment of a school and mission at Pt. Barrow, the extreme northern point of land in the United States, and within twenty-five miles of the northernmost point of Greenland. In twenty years over one hundred vessels have

been wrecked on this dangeraus coast, casting ashore hundreds of men to find no subsistence.

This led the United States Government to establish a Refuge Station here, and now there clusters about it a village of thirty families, living in houses partly built under ground, the roofs supported by rafters of whale jaws and ribs.

The Government refused to assume the whole charge of a school here, though it would aid any missionary organization which would undertake it. To churches of all names did Dr. Jackson go, but all refused. Finally, through the noble gift of Mrs. Margaret Vanderbilt Shephard, this school was established in 1890 and placed under the care of the Woman's Executive Committee of Home Missions of the Presbyterian Church.

The first teacher left his wife and children in Ohio while he entered on a two years' exile, hearing from home but once or twice a year. Beginning with three pupils, he soon had forty, enthusiastic and ambitious to learn to "make the paper talk," and delighted when they had mastered the first word—r-a-t, rat—which, to his amusement, he found written all over the neighborhood with stick or finger, in frost and snow, in letters small and large.

Think what it is to those hungry minds to have occupation during the long Arctic night, which lasts from November to February.

The introduction of the domesticated reindeer of Siberia into Alaska is a project of Dr. Jackson's. The aim is to help the Eskimos in their dire extremity, brought about by the destruction of their native food products by the white man. This year is showing the first beneficent results of what was thought almost an absurdity, and laughed at by ignorant Congressmen and flippant newspaper editors, as being about equal to sending palm leaf fans to Africa, or red flannel petticoats to India.

It is a pleasant probability to contemplate that from this furthest point of Alaska the Gospel will eventually penetrate into Siberia. No establishment of missions is permitted by the Russian Government, but the Alaskans, who mingle with the Siberians and speak the same language, will carry the good news—a happy return of good for evil, as we remember the misery brought to

those shores by Catherine's loads of Russian convicts. We must pay a tribute to the self-denying work of the Moravians in Arctic Alaska—that noble church, which asks and takes the hardest work everywhere—and while we as a church have the right to be proud of our work in Alaska—the pioneer work and to-day the most extensive and successful—yet we must remember that workers of all names have followed in our footsteps, and are giving their lives, too, for the elevation of the Great Land.

When I was asked to prepare this paper on Alaska, one reason given was that I had "been there." This fact itself made me more timorous.

The conventional tourist trip of twelve days from Portland serves but to impress one with the lack of time and opportunity for study, be it of missions or glaciers. The mind is simply filled with a succession of marvelous panoramic pictures.

There float before me visions of terraces of green, snow-capped mountains piercing the sky; of far away shimmering cascades; of vast forests as impenetrable, as inscrutible as the face of the sphinx, and musical with unseen waterfalls; of enchanted islands, lovely and lonely enough to be the prison of some Indian Lady of Shallot; skies of azure, of amber, of palest greens, of reds so bold and gorgeous that the ice fields blush; of strange icebergs in every conceivable shape and size, like the work of some mighty Venetian glass-blower, white, green, every shade and tint of cerulean blue, all hurrying down past us, to melt away in the warm current as the few clouds of a summer day fade and disappear.

I see the glaciers, miles wide, standing like huge frozen sentinels at the mouths of frozen rivers whose extent no man knows, moving slowly, imperceptibly, in the majestic march of the ages, and seeming in thundering tones, as the icebergs drop from their great sides, to rebuke the chatter of the impertinent tourist who snaps his kodak at them.

Another thundering now, of man's device not nature's cannonade, as innumerable machines crush the mighty rocks to powder, at the gold mines on Douglass Island. Little yellow bubbles rise to the surface of hissing pans, and tell us that man's mind and cunning inge-

nuity can make the everlasting hills, themselves, pay tribute.

Pictures of strange little towns come to mind, nestling at the foot of precipitous mountains; of piers thronged with all sorts and conditions of men; of lines of Indian women in gay blankets, squatting on the ground selling fantastic baskets; horrid old witch-like faces, with the lip ring accentuating their ugliness; here a brown face of real sweetness, beaming with pride as the group of "fin de siecle" tourists pet her baby, and —yes, for this is so everywhere—snap their cameras in her face.

I see the group of tourists, themselves, from all parts of the Union; the English globe-trotters, one a woman of seventy, who walks more and sees more every time, than any one else; the numerous women making collections of souvenir spoons, losing all manner of characteristic sights as they rush to buy the silver spoon, made in New York or San Francisco. All these pervading the village like a new atmosphere, gazing up at the totem poles, the genealogical tree of the tribe or family.

I see the inquisitive Yankee, who pulls a slat off the column containing the ashes of the dead. I see the happy girl who buys a silver bangle "right off the woman's arm her own bracelet, you know; isn't it lovely?" and as soon as her back is turned another bangle is on the same arm, ready for the next purchaser. The typical New Yorker, on his return from a trip around the world, is talking Japanese, Chinese, French, German, Arabian, everything, at a hideous old woman whose lip ring he finally succeeds in buying.

The sharp whistle of the steamer wakes the echoes and warns us that hours have flown. The missionary bids us good-bye, for we find one or more of our own wherever we go, and we leave behind with him bundles of papers and books and magazines collected on the steamer.

There is the usual loud talking man on board, he who obtains his information on the "state of religion" and of missionary work from a lounger on the dock, who is only too glad to fill him up with lies or, what is worse and more dangerous, half truths. He will probably publish in the columns of some confiding paper or magazine what he learned from this source, tinctured with

rum and Romanism, under the title, "Missions a Failure, from Personal Observation."

There is excitement on board, for we leave behind us one of our firemen, arrested for selling whiskey to the Indians. We trust six months in jail will cure him of such abominable traffic.

And now comes a vision of beauty, as we near Sitka, its harbor and bay suggesting the famous bay of Naples.

Four men-of-war are lying at anchor, one having just brought in as prisoner a ship caught killing seal out of season. Every loyal American heart throbs at the sight of the flying stars and stripes, and the blue naval uniform and our Jack Tar, of whom the town is full. There is a strangely sophisticated group of women on the pier, who prove to be the wives of naval officers, who have followed their husbands here, and help to make, with the missionaries, a delightful little colony. Out of our two hundred passengers there are naturally some acquaintances, and unexpected and welcome meetings take place, and there are tears and homesick faces when we leave the next day.

We notice other uniforms, very plain and neat, and soon learn that the wearers are Indian boys from our school, detailed to escort all who wish over the town and out to the school.

We gladly follow a bright handsome boy through the neat streets, with the quaint low-roofed white houses, along the beach road, and we soon see the flag floating from the roof of the school.

The effort made to train these boys, not only into pure, good living and into Christian life and practice, but to make them intelligent, loyal American citizens, is most commendable.

What an object lesson, what an inspiration that visit becomes! There is no flaw to pick here. Through school rooms and dormitories, so clean and plain; through the shops where all manual occupations were taught (the boys even catch and salt down the fish for winter's use), through the little hospital we go, where are some dusky sufferers, and into the museum where are native curiosities of all kinds with relics of the devil worship and the awful reign of the shaman or medicine man.

As we learn of the pitiful lack of ordinary knowledge and care of the body among the natives, we wonder that with other drawbacks the race has survived at all, and are once more convinced that the healing of body and soul must go together. He who on earth hath made the lame to walk and the blind to see, who raised the dying and the dead, would have it so, and such work cannot fail of His blessing.

We see the modest little cottage homes, material for which are given to any Christian young couple starting in their new life. Each of these homes is a text, a sermon, and an application in itself to Alaskans, for hundreds of miles around.

No one present can ever forget that prayer meeting of native Christians. There were those who went from curiosity alone and to be entertained, but all who "went to scoff remained to pray."

As one after another, old and young, men and women and children, in quiet earnest tones, rose and talked to God with a child's unconsciousness, every eye filled, though we could understand but one name, which like a perfume was in all, Jesus, the name above all names.

All this was the best thing in Alaska, although there were good people on the "Queen," who were too busy buying curios to find it out. At the extreme other end of town is the Indian Ranche, where live the unchristianized natives—a noisy, dirty place, a speaking contrast and a painful one as we realized how this boarding school began, seven ambitious Alaskan boys coming to the day school and begging to be allowed to stay and sleep on the floor, for in the noise and rioting of the Rauche they could not study or keep good.

As we walked back to the village and saw the great extinct volcano towering up back of the dome of the Greek Church, and as, in the church, the one priest left showed us the "holy of holies," the gorgeous robes, all embroidered with gold and jewels, and the few art treasures left when Russia sold Alaska, there seemed a curious analogy between that dead mountain and that dead church with only relics in its heart. A warmth and glow filled us as we thought of "a green hill far away, without a city wall," whence emanated the Spirit, ever living, throbbing, working, of Christ himself, the

impetus to self-sacrifice, which has always sent and will always send men and women to the wilderness, to the distant islands of the sea, into literal hells on earth, if perchance, they may help to save the souls of men.

The long twilight suited our mood, for it was but twilight at midnight, and the next night, when we were further north, there was no real darkness, the sun sinking to rest but for an hour behind an illuminated cloud bank, then rising again. It suggested thoughts of that world where there shall be "no night, where there shall be no need of a candle, nor of the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light and they shall reign forever and ever."

Only the fringe of this great land of Alaska has been enlightened by the knowledge of Christ. Pray and help, that the Sun of Righteousness may arise, with healing in his wings.

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